



K-12 Buyer's Guide: Professional Learning Management System

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Introduction

You're investing a lot in professional learning and tracking, but are you getting the full value of your investment? Professional development (PD) has become even more important for many schools and districts as teachers and staff need to learn new skills for online instruction, health and safety, and social and emotional learning (SEL).

K-12 education is changing fast. Educators need more support than ever because they're on the frontlines of these changes. New procedures, significant turnover, and continuing uncertainties make life stressful for teachers and staff.

Here's what we know:

- ✓ **44%** of new teachers typically leave within five years¹
- ✓ **95%** of feelings teachers reported in a Yale study are rooted in anxiety²
- ✓ Teaching is changing rapidly, and teachers feel pressure to adjust

Because of these trends, the concept of PD continues to shift from an annual compliance requirement to a supportive, ongoing resource to promote teacher and staff growth and career fulfillment.

PD solutions need to evolve with this changing need as well. This guide helps you assess how well your current system meets your needs. It also provides guidance based on what is working for other districts across the country.



Why It's Time For a Modern Professional Learning Solution

Why It's Time for a Modern Professional Learning Solution

As demand for new skills grows, there's a clear need for a more effective and efficient way to manage professional learning and PD. For that reason, we've seen schools and districts shift how they build, manage, offer, track, and report activity in recent years.

Professional learning and PD needs have changed from:



Mainly summer to always-on



Compliance to supporting growth



Standardized to personalized



Teachers finding their own to districts recommending courses

Educators also struggle with too many systems and too many manual processes. A vital attribute of a modern professional learning solution is usability and data-sharing to reduce the burden on already stressed staff.

Key Questions for Assessing Your Current System

To support K-12 teachers and staff through today's evolving challenges, PD and professional learning solutions need to evolve. That's why it's time to look at your current solution and determine where it's succeeding, where it's falling short, and whether now is the time to advance teacher support with a modern solution.

Following this objective assessment of your current system, we'll offer suggestions of what to look for in a new system if it is time to upgrade.

5 key areas to focus on include:

- 1 Anywhere, anytime learning
- 2 Tools & system integration
- 3 Collaboration and workflow
- 4 Compliance and reporting
- 5 Tracking and analysis





FOCUS AREA #1:

Anytime, Anywhere Learning



Key Question: How connected is your current solution to your LMS to allow for learning anytime, anywhere?

Traditionally, PD happened during the summer and in person, making tracking straightforward. Over the last few years, districts have increasingly embraced hybrid education for staff (in person and online) as well as synchronous and asynchronous approaches. While these approaches serve ever-changing needs better, management becomes more complex without the right tools.

Integration with your LMS environment is key to offering always-on, synchronous and asynchronous professional learning. Are you able to share courses, monitor engagement, and report on the successful completion of online courses through your LMS solution?



Here are three evaluation questions to consider:

- 1 Can you offer both synchronous and asynchronous training for staff?
- 2 How easily can you track online learning progress and completion?
- 3 How easily can you distribute professional learning via your LMS?

FOCUS AREA #2:

Tools & Systems Integration



Key Question: How personalized is your current system? Are you able to assign learning based on evaluations and student data, for example?

Educators need more than to meet compliance requirements. They benefit more from individualized support that helps them grow in their role. While some traditional systems allow organizations to track and monitor attendance or compliance for specific courses, they're less effective at helping educators focus on building their skills and fulfilling career aspirations.

Ideally, PD considers more than just an employee's role and years working. It should also take into account evaluation feedback to identify areas of improvement that best serve the teacher or staff member's growth. Leveraging student data is another way to spot and address where a teacher can improve their classroom effectiveness.

Personalizing PD planning to this degree requires integration with your evaluations system and student data. With a unified system that lets administrators and managers see the big picture, the door to more supportive, personalized career growth swings open.



Here are three evaluation questions to consider:

- 1** Do evaluation results and student data guide PD planning for your educators and staff?
- 2** Can you easily adapt professional learning to needs that arise throughout the year?
- 3** How easy is it for evaluators to assign professional learning based on observations and feedback?

FOCUS AREA #3:

Collaboration and Workflow



Key Question: How easily can you share classes and material with all your staff, not just teachers or administrators?

Defining personalized training needs for your entire staff can be daunting if HR teams manually pick courses for each employee. However, many districts find success with a combination of automation and collaboration.

You can achieve a baseline level of personalization by automating some course assignments based on role, time in position, previous experience, and other attributes. This ensures that employees get courses generally relevant to their position and needs. If an educator's role changes, these automated professional learning assignments change when their role is updated in the system.

From there, administrators and managers can spend more time fine-tuning professional learning plans based on collaborative events, like observations, evaluations, and growth conversations.

It's also a lot to expect HR and curriculum teams to find and recommend valuable training content across all topics. By letting teachers and participants recommend courses and share their feedback, peers can help each other identify valuable content.

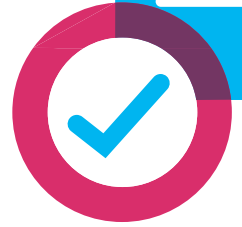


Here are three evaluation questions to consider:

- 1 How easily are professional learning courses assigned to teachers and staff when their role changes?
- 2 Can employees post feedback and learning content recommendations?
- 3 How long does it take HR to manage course assignments and tracking?

FOCUS AREA #4:

Compliance and Reporting



Key Question: How simple is it to report completed training, regardless of where it was taken?

As learning experiences move online and into non-traditional locations, simplifying and automating reporting is more important than ever. For example, many districts use regular staff meetings to cover required training, including health and safety protocols or SEL training. HR and curriculum staff can allow attendees to easily track the completion of these learning experiences.

It's difficult for HR staff to keep up with ever-changing compliance requirements. With automation, your professional learning tracking can pull in completion data from your online LMS or enable staff to centrally record completion. Either way, it's easier for HR leaders to quickly check compliance status and know when requirements are met.

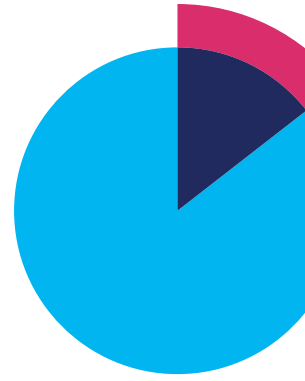
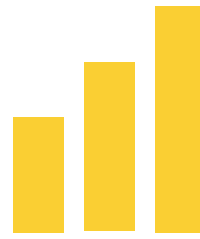


Here are three evaluation questions to consider:

- 1** Can teachers and staff easily log professional learning course completion?
- 2** Are tracking and compliance status available online or on a mobile app?
- 3** Does any LMS-based training get automatically tracked and reported?

FOCUS AREA #5:

Tracking and Analysis



Key Question: Is it easy to identify the impact of your PD program and areas to improve?

Professional learning is a major investment by districts. Budgets and time are only getting tighter. It's more important than ever to know how your PD investment benefits students, teachers, and your entire organization. This is where schools and districts can truly tailor PD to meet their own unique needs and strategic plans.

Reporting should pull in more than just completion data. While that's enough to meet compliance, it doesn't reveal its impact on factors like student learning and teacher satisfaction.

Flagging potential issues and cross-connecting with additional data, such as student performance, is necessary to determine long-term impact. Schools and districts can focus their investments on the most successful programs while improving educator effectiveness with better data.



Here are three evaluation questions to consider:

- 1 Can you easily see completion and engagement data?
- 2 Can employees submit course feedback and make recommendations?
- 3 Does PD data integrate with student performance data to help you gauge impact?



How to Choose the Right Professional Learning Management Solution for Your School or District

How to Choose the Right Professional Learning Management Solution for Your School or District

It's critical to consider your unique needs when choosing a new professional learning solution.

With a platform that can easily track and manage PD for both HR and staff, you can better support evolving needs. Interoperability with other data systems and advanced reporting can help provide actionable insights into PD effectiveness and areas to improve.



How do you know what to look for in a professional learning management solution that's right for your school or district?

A best-in-class professional learning management solution:

- 1 Enables individualized learning
- 2 Supports hybrid learning
- 3 Encourages collaboration
- 4 Makes learning easy for teachers and staff
- 5 Provides data and analytics about PD program success

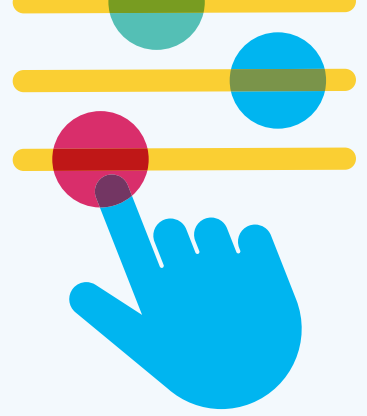


WHAT TO LOOK FOR #1:

Enables Individualized Learning

Support teachers and staff with professional learning tailored to their needs and career aspirations. When PD planning corresponds to individual growth plans and skills development, learners gain the most benefit from it. This is where one-size-fits-all, compliance-based approaches fall short.

Look for a solution that allows professional learning to be easily changed, adapted, and managed throughout the year.



Here's what to look for in a PD platform that enables individualized learning:

- 1 Ability to assign professional learning based on evaluation feedback
- 2 Student data integration to identify classroom needs specific to each teacher
- 3 Options for staff to choose off-the-shelf courses by industry experts in addition to your own professional learning courses

WHAT TO LOOK FOR #2:

Supports Hybrid Learning

Give teachers and staff more flexibility. A system that supports hybrid learning lets teachers and staff complete courses within times that work best for them. In the summer, that means they can more easily learn around travel and other plans. Throughout the school year, they can choose to learn on or off campus.

Choose a system that gives employees more flexibility to help drive engagement.



Here's what to look for in a PD platform that enables hybrid learning:

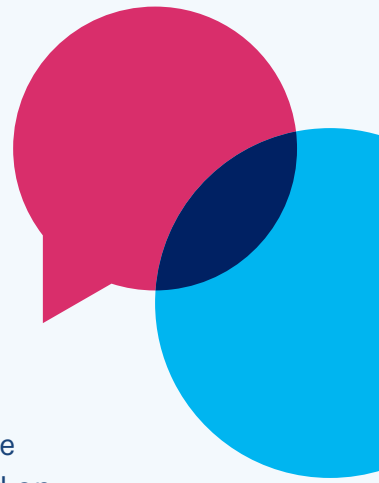
- 1 Support for synchronous and asynchronous training options for all employees
- 2 Capability to connect to your favorite teaching and learning tools and content
- 3 Automated or centralized tracking of online, in-person, and any other form of learning

WHAT TO LOOK FOR #3:

Encourages Collaboration

Support collaborative growth with a PD system that elevates peer voices. With the ability to rate and recommend professional learning courses, teachers can help each other find high-quality learning content they feel is most beneficial. Administrators can review this feedback to help build future learning plans, and they can tailor professional learning assignments based on observation and evaluation feedback.

Collaborative PD promotes engagement by giving teachers and staff a strong voice in their career growth.



Here's what to look for in a PD platform that encourages collaboration:

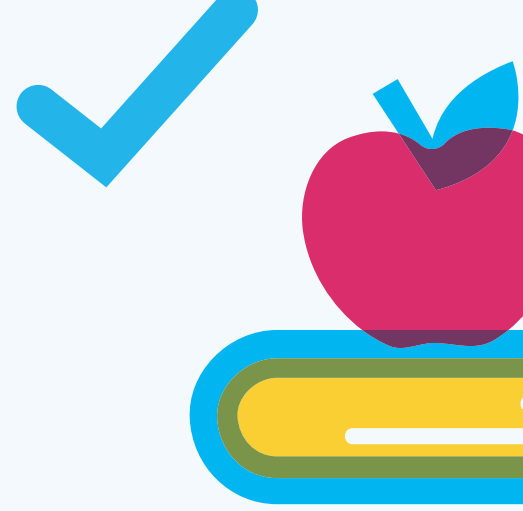
- 1 Peer-to-peer recommendations of high-quality professional learning content
- 2 Ability to choose and assign professional learning based on evaluations, observations, and growth conversations with administrators
- 3 Options to build out your own training materials and scale-up offerings in response to demand

WHAT TO LOOK FOR #4:

Makes Learning Easy for Teachers and Staff

Simplify PD for teachers and staff with tools that make it easy to choose courses, complete assignments, and track and monitor progress. Secure, online access and intuitive dashboards can take common headaches out of professional learning. Plus, you'll give employees more time to focus on learning rather than getting bogged down navigating complicated systems.

The easier it is to learn, the more everyone will get out of it.



Here's what to look for in a PD platform that makes learning easy:

- 1 Online professional learning course catalog to simplify choices
- 2 Online training when, where, and how attendees want to engage
- 3 Mobile app to track and monitor PD from anywhere, on any device

WHAT TO LOOK FOR #5:

Provides Data and Analytics about PD Program Success

See the impact of professional learning and make improvements along the way. Comprehensive data and analytics, including student performance, PD engagement, and teacher evaluations feedback, give you the big picture. Find out how professional learning correlates to changes in student performance and teacher and staff growth. Identify areas that need improvement and respond with a data-driven approach.

Get the information you need to continuously tailor PD to your unique needs.

 Here's what to look for in a PD platform that provides data and analytics about PD program success:

- 1 Detailed course completion and engagement data
- 2 Ability for employees to rate and recommend professional learning courses
- 3 Integrated PD and student performance data



The Benefits of PowerSchool Unified Talent™ Professional Learning

Why PowerSchool Unified Talent™ Professional Learning?

Discover how your students, teachers, administrators, and parents can benefit from the PowerSchool Unified Talent™ solution.

Unified Talent™ Professional Learning gives you the tools to support teachers and staff with individualized PD. Make learning more engaging, collaborative, convenient, and effective. Professional Learning lets you manage, track, and continuously adapt PD as needs evolve throughout the year. Integrate PD data with tools for teacher evaluations, student performance, and other sources to take a big-picture, data-driven approach to improvement and career growth.



The PowerSchool Unified Talent™ Professional Learning management solution supports employee success and growth with a centralized tool for:

- ✓ Individualized career support
- ✓ Hybrid learning
- ✓ Collaborative growth
- ✓ Comprehensive data and analytics
- ✓ Simplified learning






Individualized Career Support with Professional Learning

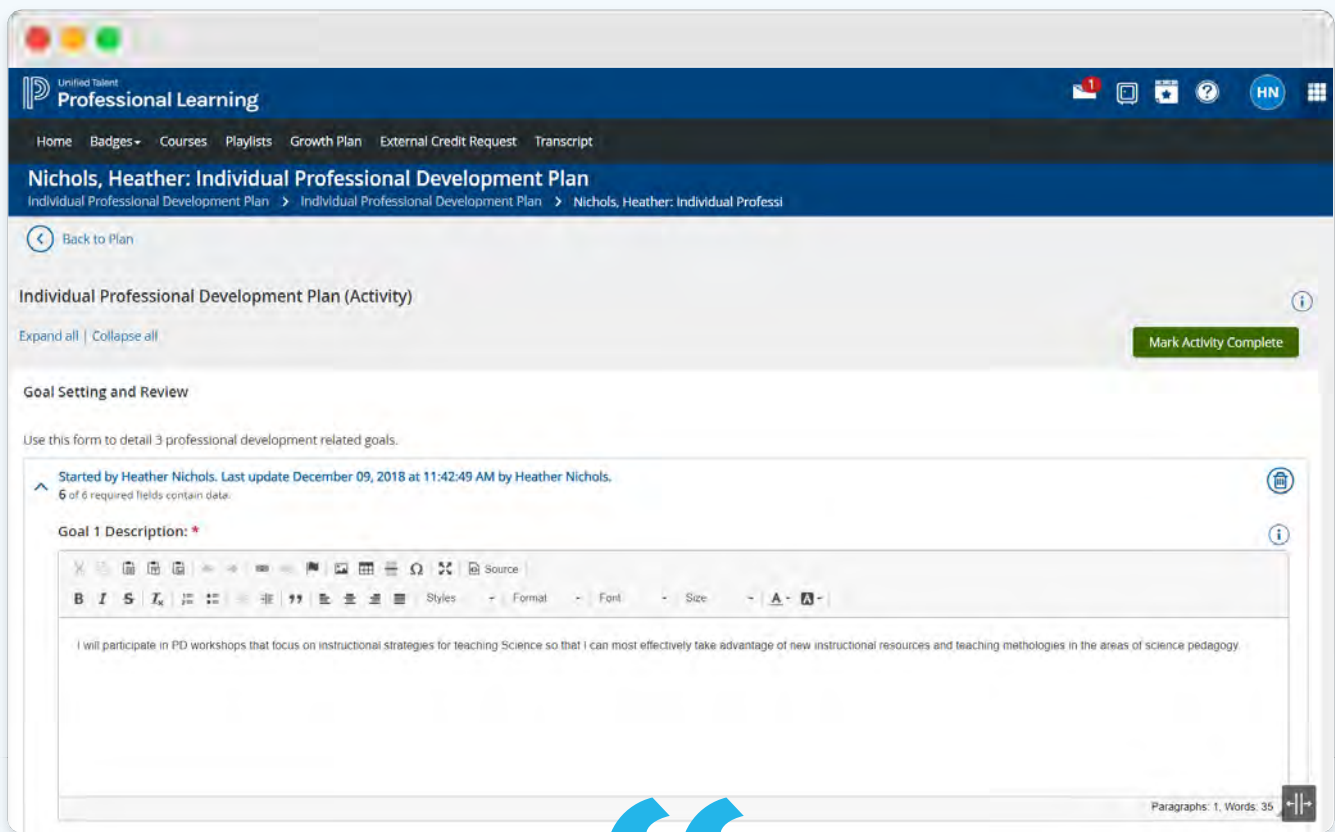


Create personalized professional learning plans for each teacher and staff member from day one. Unified Talent™ Professional Learning lets you assign courses as part of onboarding for new employees. Continuously adjust plans throughout the year. Help everyone build vital skills, grow their careers, and better serve the needs of your district to support student success.

Professional Learning gives you year-round flexibility with the convenience of automation when and where you need it. Add to, change, or reevaluate learning plans throughout the year with any individual employee. Push out location- or role-specific training in response to widespread needs (like training for a new system or process).

Professional Learning enables individualized career support by enabling you to:

-  Create personalized PD plans for new hires to fill skills gaps and help them succeed in their role
-  Adjust learning plans anytime throughout the year as needs arise
-  Push out learning content to a specific group of employees to address a widespread need



Professional learning gets assigned during the onboarding process according to each new hire’s individual needs, creating a personalized learning experience. Evaluators can suggest professional learning content while logging observation results. Communication has vastly improved, with principals and administrators able to support each teacher’s unique career growth.

DEBRA LANE | Director of Talent Development,
Alexandria City Public Schools, VA

Hybrid Learning with Professional Learning

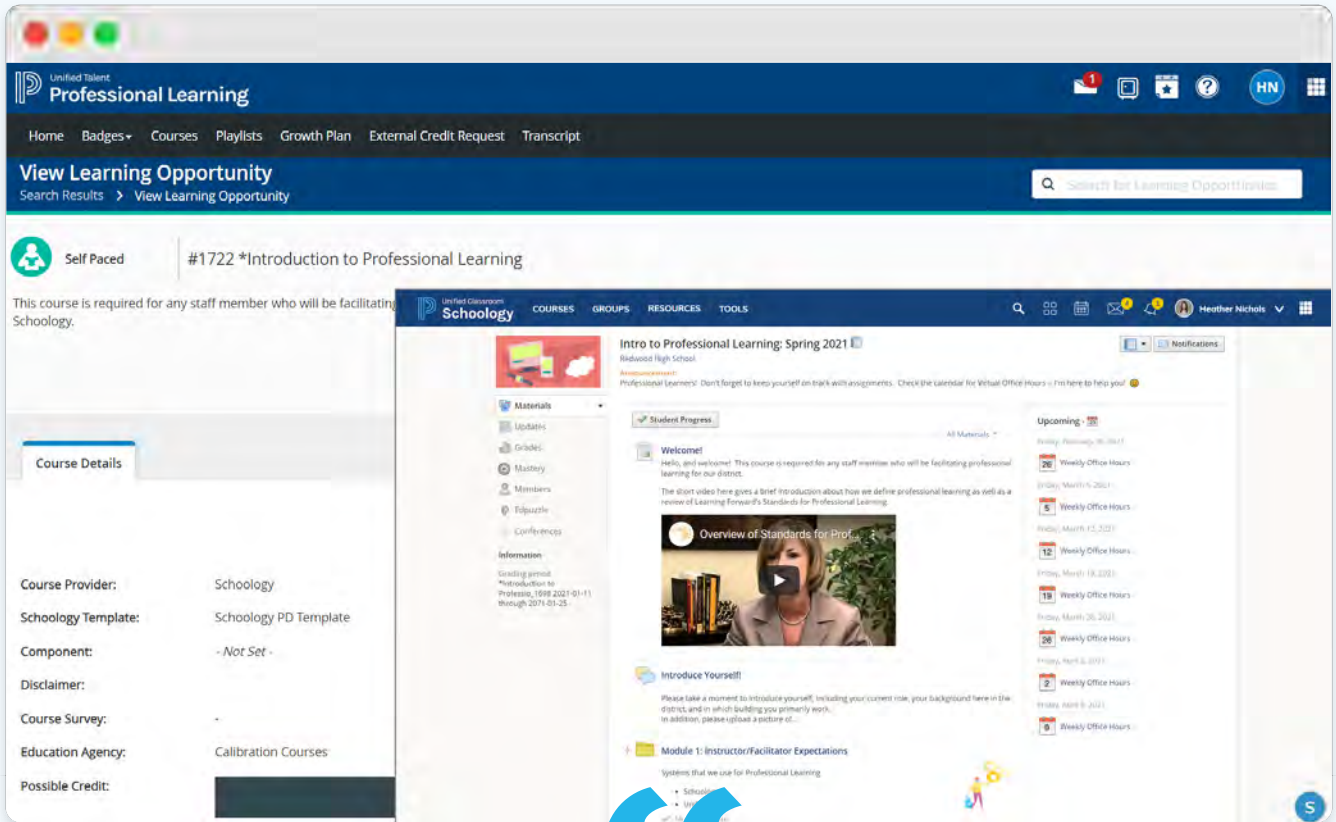


Give employees the freedom to learn anywhere. Unified Talent™ Professional Learning enables hybrid learning, so you can assign a wide variety of courses and content through a learning management system (LMS) like Unified Classroom™ Schoology Learning. It's easy to plan and track completion of both in-person learning events and virtual courses. Adjust learning assignments to meet individual employee needs, too. If a teacher needs more flexibility around a specific learning event, offer a virtual learning alternative.

Because Professional Learning is always available and accessible online from anywhere, employees can learn when, where, and how it works best for them. Give every teacher and staff member the freedom to learn around busy schedules.

Professional Learning supports hybrid learning by letting you:

- ✓ Integrate Professional Learning with your LMS, like Schoology Learning, to deliver synchronous or asynchronous learning content
- ✓ Plan, track, and personalize learning in the format that fits individual employees best
- ✓ Give teachers and staff the freedom to learn from anywhere, 24/7



They get the courses they want, and the integration makes it so easy for us to manage.

ALYSSA MOORE | Director of the Office of Digital Learning,
Delaware Department of Education




Collaborative Growth with Professional Learning

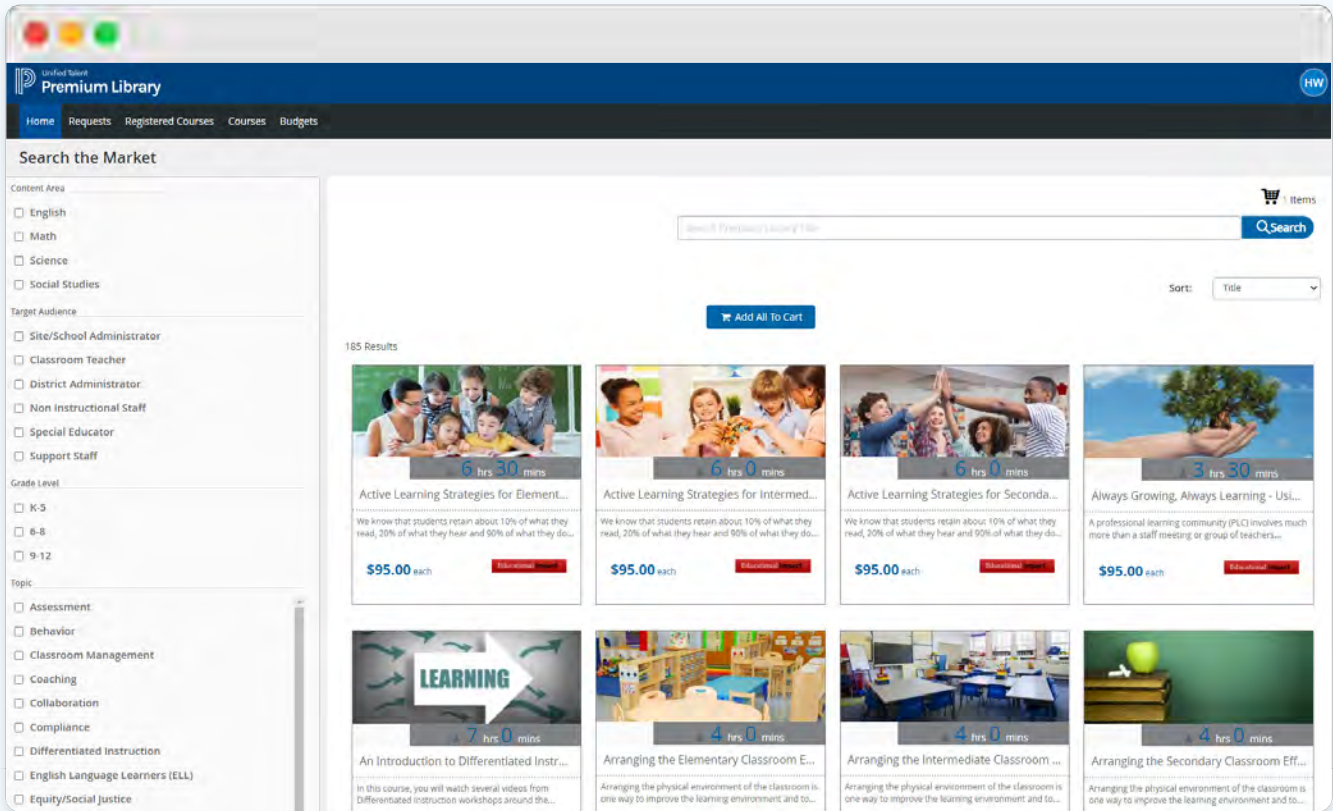


Promote collaborative career growth by giving administrators and managers the tools to support each employee's PD needs. Adapt learning plans to evaluations feedback and empower employees to support career growth plans with content directed at their next step.

Unified Talent™ Professional Learning provides the always-on, adaptable planning, delivery, and tracking tool you need to support each employee's needs. Easily make changes on the fly during meetings and discussions to ensure everybody's on the same page, saving time for administrators and managers.

Professional Learning supports collaborative growth by enabling you to:

-  Create and adjust learning plans according to evaluations feedback
-  Support individual career growth plans with content needed for an employee's next step
-  Edit PD plans anytime, anywhere to save time for administrators and managers



The Professional Learning Premium Library gives you access to over 300 off-the-shelf courses to support teacher and staff growth.

Comprehensive PD Data and Analytics with Unified Talent, Unified Classroom, and Unified Insights

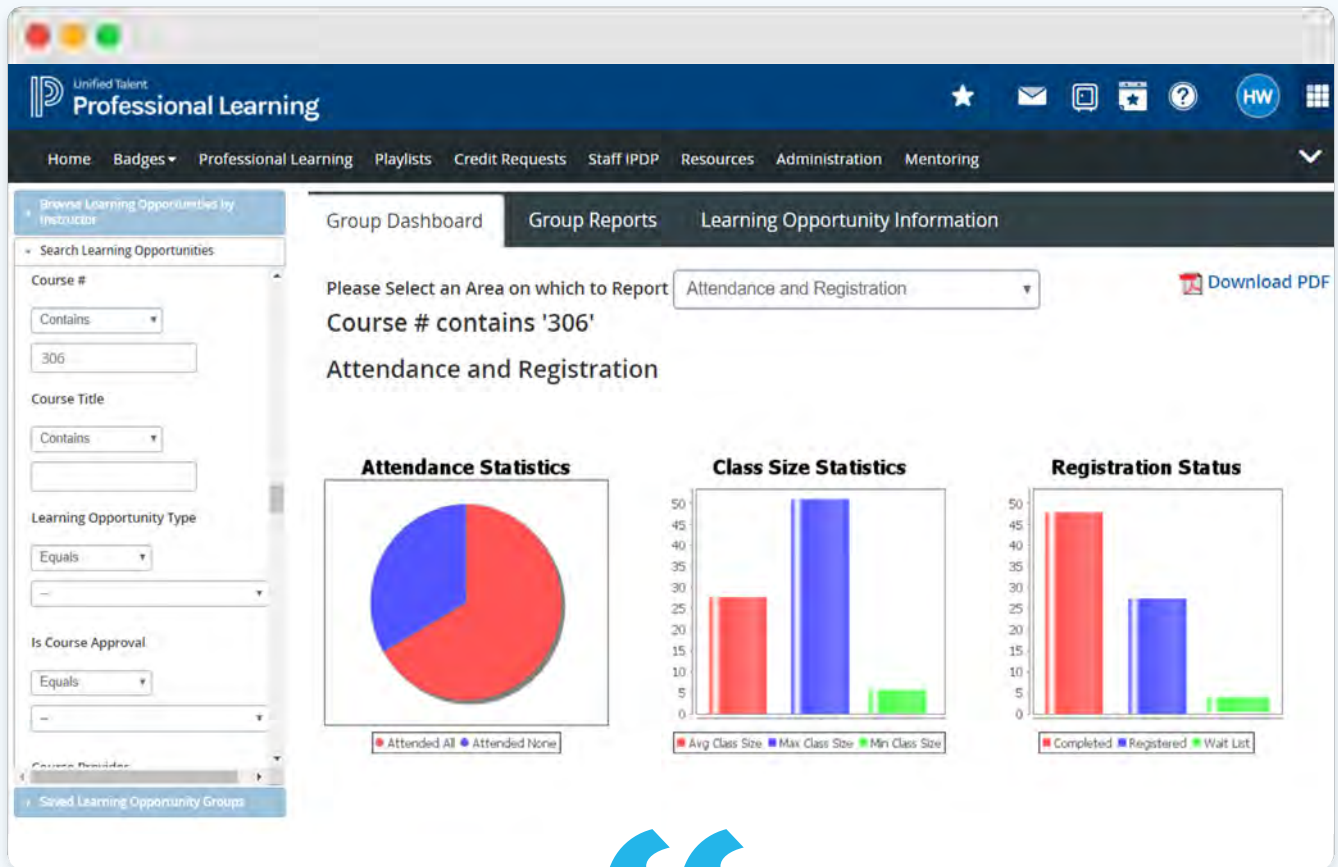


Get data and analytics to continuously improve PD plans, engagement, and results. Unified Talent™ Professional Learning enables teachers and staff to rate and suggest courses, bringing teacher voice into a detailed analysis of participation and completion. Integrate Professional Learning with your student data platforms, like Unified Classroom, to measure the impact of PD on student learning.

Combined with an advanced data analytics platform like Unified Insights, Professional Learning helps you build and scale a PD program around teacher, staff, and student success.

Professional Learning supports comprehensive PD data and analytics so you can:

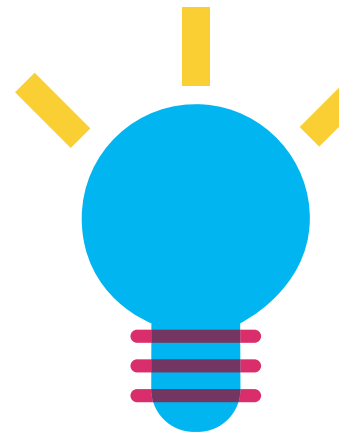
- ✓ Identify learning content and courses teachers and staff find most valuable
- ✓ Measure the impact of PD on employee growth and student learning
- ✓ Build and scale a PD program that supports teacher, staff, and student needs



We look at performance data for each individual, and we use that to drive their professional development activities. That's been a huge tool for our Director of Professional Learning. We're actually saying, 'This is where we need help' and, 'We don't need to focus on this.'

MARIE KUEHLER | Director of Human Resources and Customer Service, Comal ISD, TX

Simplified Learning with Professional Learning and Schoology Learning

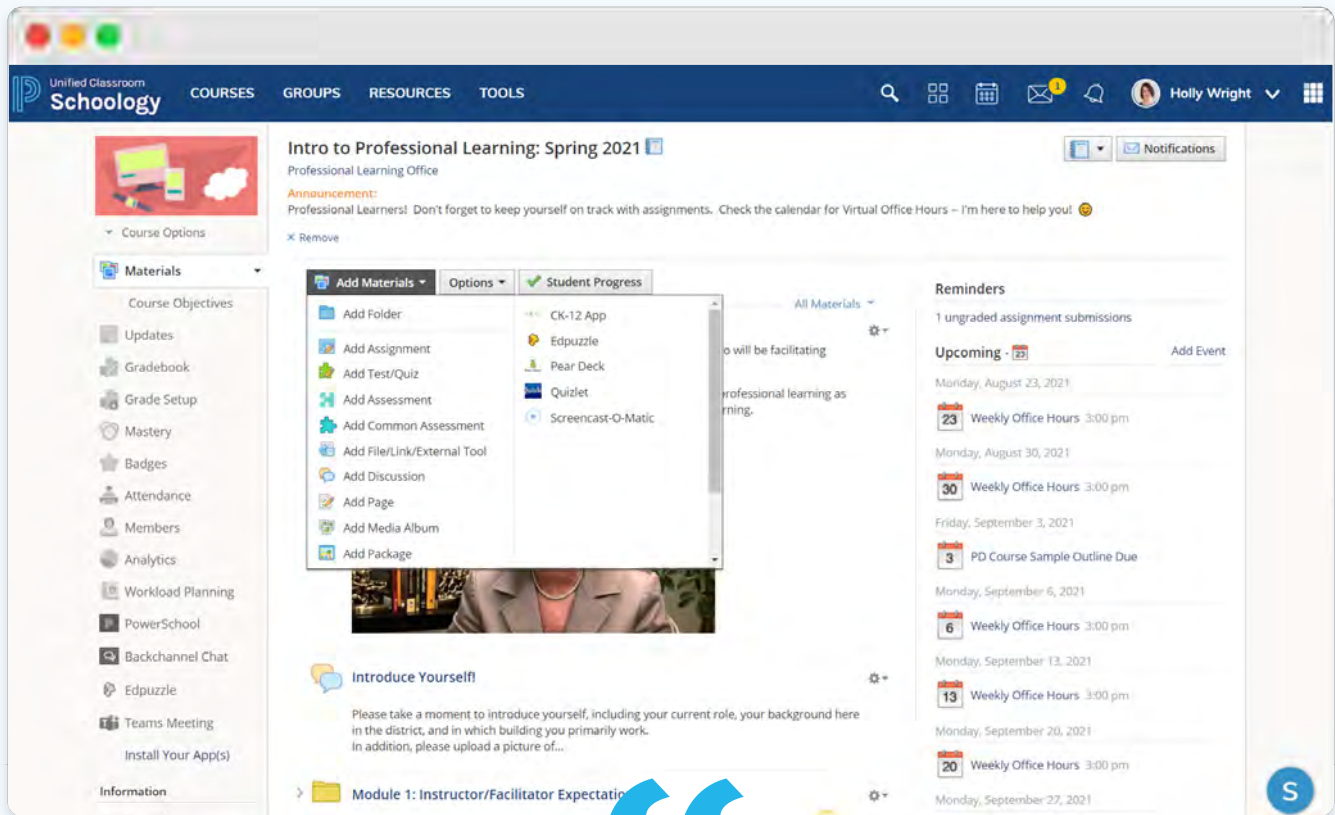


Make learning and PD participation easy for teachers and staff. With the combination of 24/7 online access, integration with familiar learning platforms like Schoology Learning, and intuitive dashboards, Professional Learning clears career growth roadblocks. Build PD playlists to make it easy for employees to see what's next in their learning plan and easily complete it. **No more time wasted looking for what needs to get done**—teachers and staff can focus more of their time on learning.

From implementation, our PowerSchool experts and active PowerSchool Community members can help you quickly learn and expand your use of every Professional Learning feature.

Professional Learning simplifies learning by letting you:

- ✓ Offer employees and staff intuitive, comprehensive dashboards to see plans and important dates at a glance
- ✓ Build PD playlists to help employees easily stay on track with learning plans
- ✓ Enhance your use of every Professional Learning features through expert training and PowerSchool Community advice



Implementation normally takes six months. We actually did it in about three. We wanted to make sure that we could do our summer professional development through PowerSchool. We built all of our training online with [Unified Classroom™ Schoology Learning], making it easy to pull reports and track completion.

ERIKA MCNICHOL | Professional Development Manager,
Greeley-Evans School District 6, CO



PowerSchool supports over 45 million students and 12,000+ districts, schools, and other educational institutions in more than 90 countries.



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Conclusion

Supporting teachers and staff through the ever-evolving challenges in K-12 education requires more than PD compliance—it calls for an always-on, adaptable approach that supports each individual.

With a modern solution like Unified Talent™ Professional Learning, you can support your employees through every step of their careers. Most importantly, you can build a PD program that grows with your district and supports student learning by helping every educator reach their full potential.

Give your teachers and staff a clear path to their own success and help your school or district thrive with Professional Learning. Together, we can move education forward by giving teachers and staff the support they deserve.



Sources

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